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The
PRODIGAL



*Francesca
Jalk
Miller*

The Prodigal

The Prodigal
and

Other Poems

By
Francesca Falk Miller



Hyman-McGee Co.
Chicago

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Acknowledgement

THE publishers gratefully acknowledge the courtesy of M. Witmark and Sons in permitting the use of the title poem of this book, "The Prodigal," which they issued as a song under the title of "Mother, Oh My Mother!"

The courtesy of the Chicago Tribune, the San Antonio Express, the Fort Worth Record, the Waco, Texas, Times Herald, the Houston Post and the New York Herald, is also gratefully acknowledged.

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Preface

Francesca

Why was I called this limpid, lyric name
That breathes Italia's vine-encircled sea,
And those proud women—what were they to me,
Whose fairness mouldered long before I came?
That long procession—beauty; passion; fame!
The one best loved—ah, none so fair as she,
That men should lose their souls da Rimini!
What have they left behind that I might claim
From those dim years? How do they play their part
In my own destiny,—with plain, familiar face,
That I should bear a name that breathes their grace;
(Ah,—missing rose leaves, hid within the bowl!)
They left a touch of Romance in my heart
They left the love of Beauty in my soul!

The Prodigal

Prodigal

There's a yearning cry in my heart today,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
For the childhood hours that are far away,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
I have trod alone on a weary road;
And have gathered what my hands have sowed;
But you've not been there to ease the load—
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!

There is brown no more in your silvered hair,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
And your dear, sweet face is lined with care,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
I have made you worry and made you weep;
I have roamed the world and sailed the deep;
But back to your arms I fain would creep—
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!

I am tired to death of the strain and stress,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
I am longing now for your soft caress,
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!
The plaudits of life are but froth and foam;
The world is wide to the hearts that roam;
Say you'll forgive me—I'm coming home!
 Mother! Oh, my Mother!

The Prodigal

There are sins and scars I must bring with me,
Mother! Oh, my Mother!
There's a look in my eyes that you should not see,
Mother! Oh, my Mother!
But my heart is repentant—my spirit awed;
And your trust is deep, and your love is broad;
So I'm coming back, to you—and God!
Mother! Oh, my Mother!

HOMAGE

I love you!

The lark that mounts on vibrant wing,
So high:
The coo of wood-dove in the Spring,
So soft:
The serenade that lovers sing,
So low.
I find May's sunlight on your face,
Epitomized within your grace.

I love you!

I love you!

Reflections on a placid lake,
So clear:
The hare-bell, blue beneath the brake,
So shy:
The drooping poppy,—half awake,
So red.
The wealth of summer's pulsing life,
Has blossomed in your heart, my wife.

I love you!

I love you!

The petals curling from a rose,
So soft:
The ripen'd fields where fragrance blows,
So warm:
The sumac—nodding in repose,
So light.
All autumn's richness, warmth and cheer,
Has but enhanced each passing year.

I love you!

The Prodigal

I love you!
With winter's snow upon your brow,
So white:
With tender hands that tremble now,
So frail:
The falling leaf: the barren bough,
So drear.
Let me repeat with my last breath,—
In youth—in age, in life—in death,
I love you!

DAUGHTER OF MINE

There's a mirror that hangs on the opposite wall
 In a primly, accustomed place,
And I often sit and gaze in its depth
 At my own, and familiar face.
But I see no beauty that passing years
 Have carved in each deepening line,
So I turn from the mirror and look upon you,—
 Dear little daughter of mine!

The bloom of your face—like the lilies of dawn—
 Was once on my own cheek and brow,
And the gleam in your eyes—it was mine too, I know,
 But tears have softened it now.
And your lips—twin petals of cardinal flowers—
 Expectant of love's dawning bliss—
I feel once again, as I look at their joy,
 The touch of my own lover's kiss!

The songs that you sing—they are echoes of mine,
 And your joys—I repeat them by name.
I recall every one of your gossamer dreams
 Before disillusionment came.
I can hear in your voice that same challenge to life—
 A banner emblazoning trust—
That Youth holds uplifted; untarnished; untorn;
 Till Age flings it down in the dust!

The Prodigal

But the mirror is fair and the mirror is clean:
I can look in your eyes without fear,
And treasure your faith as a beautiful thing,
Reflecting its radiance clear.
To see my own handiwork wrought with the years—
As alchemists metals refine;
To live my life over—perfected in you,—
Dear little daughter of mine!

The Prodigal

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Alone?

In wilderness of lofty, virgin trees,
That swayed to every gentle, prairie breeze
Above his cabin home.
A lone, pathetic figure of the age,
Poring o'er oft-read, crumpled page
By feeble candle-light; by moonlit hour;
Sowing the seeds of truth that grew to power!
Alone—that awkward boy,—misunderstood?
No, not alone,—for by his side, those early years,—
His mother stood!

Alone?

Holding in trust his warring country's fate,
While merciless rebuke and sullen hate
Upon his head was spent.
Burdened by cares unnumbered and unknown
Sorrowed by losses touchingly his own;
Grieved by the narrowness of minds so small
They could not see the Brotherhood of All!
Alone—that saddened man—that power for good?
No, not alone,—for by his side, those darkest hours—
His Maker stood!

The Prodigal

Alone?

Within the tomb of everlasting sleep,
Where lullabies of wind and river sweep
Above his quiet rest,
While life goes on—resistless as the sea—
Sweeping the years aside eternally!
Yet once we pause—and leave our tears—our mirth,
To keep again with him—his day of birth!
Alone—that martyred dead, with folded hands?
No. not alone,—beside thee—millions strong—
A Nation stands!

The Prodigal

GEORGE WASHINGTON.

Oh, sweet Virginia hills!

A thousand wooded slopes and murmur'ring rills.

Wide sweep of river, bound with silvered girth,—

His land of birth!

Do you not feel the thrill of ownership—

Of pardonable pride—

That such as he was born upon your soil,

And on your bosom died?

Virginia! Virginia! Thy son is with us yet.

Soldier! Patriot! Gentleman!

The world will not forget!

Oh, far, fair Eastern land!

A thousand mem'ries lie within your hand.

A Concord—under peaceful, smiling sun.

A Lexington!

A Valley Forge—where hearts undaunted dreamed

Of hard-won liberty.

An ever-living monument to Faith,

And sturdy loyalty!

Far Eastern hills! Fair Eastern land! Thy son is with us yet.

Soldier! Patriot! Gentleman!

The world does not forget!

The Prodigal

Oh, loved America!
Safe from the storms your infant years endured;
Girded with memories; rich in hallowed lore
 Of peace and war!
Do you not feel the thrill of gratitude
To him of sterling worth,
When flag and hearts are raised in righteous pride
Upon his day of birth!
America! America! Thy son is with us yet.
 Soldier! Patriot! Gentleman!
 The world will not forget!

PRAYER.

Forgive us! Oh, unseen, mysterious Source,
That swings the tides; that shapes the mountain tips!
Forgive what is amiss in this brief prayer,
That trembles off our unaccustomed lips.
Forgive us for our arrogance; our pride;
Our stubborn wills; our lack of self-control
To hold in check the passions of our heart,
Before the white, sure calmness of our soul.

Forgive us if we leave contented heights
And stoop to greed and sordid money-lust,
Trampling beneath our feet the gold of dreams
In maddened craze to clutch the baser dust!
Thus struggling, so intent on further gain,
We fail our own allotted portion to enhance,
And do not sense,—while gambling with our lot,
That Character is destiny,—not Chance!

Forgive us that we turn aside from men
Who have not always kept the standard pace,
And shame us—that we look upon their rags,
And not at kindred sorrows in their face!
Forgive—that we still juggle words like “sin”
And “virtue”—or dare call a woman “lost”—
Who, through acceptance of a great, glad love,
Had reckoned not the final, social cost.

The Prodigal

Forgive us if we pass along in haste
And take not time to draw our heaven near,
Then, while we prate of future, brimstoned hell,
We make a surer one about us here.
Forgive our satisfied and narrow creeds
That block the way where searching knowledge delves.
Forgive us—that we set God on a throne,
And recognize Him not within ourselves!

AUTUMN.

There is dust on the weeds
By the side of the road,
And leaves from the dying trees.
There's a sad unrest in the autumn air,
And a moan to the slightest breeze.

Does the year at its close,
When the chill wind blows,
Feel the whisper of death
In its failing breath?
Who knows!

There's a hopeless fall
To the steady rain,
And gloom in the sodden skies.
As if they pitied the tired old earth,
So seered and dismantled it lies.

Is the year, like a soul
That has reached its goal,
And dissatisfied,
Has silently died?
Who knows!

The Prodigal

There's a gleam of gold
On the ravished fields,
And red in the harvest moon.
There's a cheer of hearth, of heart, of home,
That never is rivaled by June!

.....

Does the year, torn by pain,
Strive to tell us in vain,
With its last, sweet breath,
That there is no death?
Who knows!

THE PLANT ON THE WINDOW SILL.

A little brown pot with marks of the loam
And a gay little plant above,
While beyond are the lights and sounds of a home,
And the sheltering sense of its love.

There may be deep sorrow, there may be grim pain
Behind that staunch little flower,
But it looks bravely out through the snows and the rain,
To the ultimate sunlit hour.

It dares to challenge each threat'ning despair ;
It strengthens each faltering will ;
A sure panacea for every known care,—
A plant on the window sill !

For a humble home roof does not limit Love's power,
Nor simplicity lessen its scope,
And the hearts that can treasure one gay little flower,—
Dwell secure in the Gardens of Hope !

The Prodigal

AFTERGLOW.

You say Love came too late? Too late indeed
To pluck the early violets 'neath the snow,
Or see in mystic dawn the primrose glow
On waking sky and sea. But take thou heed
Of other beauties,—heather on the mead,
Where late October's wealth bends branches low
With golden fruit and crimson foliage-glow:
An aftermath of Summer's spend and speed.
A gentle peace now stills the passive earth:
The fever of the noon is burned and spent.
We watch the early twilight's soft descent
Upon the pollened heads of fading flowers;
Upon our throbbing hearts in this re-birth!
You say it is too late for love like ours?

Love never came too late! The latent bliss
Of Indian Summer glorifies its days!
A deeper warmth is in the Autumn haze,—
As if Life's year had found its joy remiss,
And touched the sunset hour with passion's kiss!
A redder sky—with long, reflected rays.
The golden hours—going their spendthrift ways.
And purple shadows o'er each dark abyss.
What care,—if flagrant Youth is not beside;
If cheek grows pale; if step is not so swift?
Many a flower is hid beneath the drift.
What matter,—if for this we two did wait—
And waiting—meet our Winter side by side?
If Love be deathless—can Love come too late!

The Prodigal

SINGIN' IN THE DARK.

Crickets chirpin' in the walls,
Bull-frogs in the brook,
Big moon sailin 'bove the trees
With smilin' sleepy look.
Candle-light is blown out,—
Kinda spooky,—hark!
Little boy a-goin' to bed,
Singin' in the dark!

Goblins might come through the walls,
Witches hide about,
Spooky doin's,—that I'm sure,
When the lights are out.
But to keep your courage up,
Makin' things a lark
You just start in singin'—
Singin' in the dark!

In the comin' grown-up years,
When your childhood's gone,
You can help keep hold o'things
With a cheerful song.
Don't you fear the ills that come,
Grief and trouble stark,
Just try bein' young again,—
Singin' in the dark!

The Prodigal

JUST HOME.

It may be a cot by a dusty lane
With a harvest moon on the ripened grain,
Where the elm tree shadows the kitchen door
And the crickets chirp in the old pine floor.

The lowing herd; the lagging hoof;
A spiral of smoke from a humble roof;
The creak of the pump;
The smell of the loam,—
But it's home—
Just home!

Or it may be a hut on a rock-bound shore,
Where the waves break high with an ugly roar,
And the clouds mass grey o'er the vessel's hull,—
As grey as the wings of a shrieking gull.

But a cheery fire; the boom of the sea;
A chowder bowl and a 'dish' of tea;
The tang of salt;
The mists from the foam,—
But it's home—
Just home!

There are memories haunting each dear, dear place,
As a portrait pictures a vanished face,
And the humblest room holds joys unknown
That live in the touch of the things we own.

The empty cradle; the vacant chair;
Are treasures we value beyond compare!
The roof we possess—
Be it thatch or dome—
Covers home—
Just home!

The Prodigal

The long years follow and crowd us on.
The "wanderlust" of our youth is gone.
Life runs so swiftly, age comes so fast,—
Let us take what is ours while the joy of it lasts!
A book by the fire; a pipe in hand,—
And a woman to love and understand.
The peace of Content;
No wish to roam;
For it's home—
Just home!

The Prodigal

VIEWPOINTS.

When I was young.....
And used to see a quiet sister pass,
A Nun,—
Vested in sombre black; veiled heavily
In musty, sable folds; unsmiling;
Her eyes downcast, as though the ruthless sun
Struck scorchingly upon her placid soul.....
I used to pity her,—
Though God knows why!

Now I am older.....
And when those muffled, weary footsteps pass,
The Nun,—
I seem to see beneath her sombre garb
A soul all white with ecstasy
That only joy of service gives; supreme denial
Of all those things which cloy, distract, or hinder.....
I pause to envy her,—
And would 'twere I!

When I was young.....
And used to see a Scarlet Woman pass,
Boldly,—
Decked in her rainbow hues, flamboyant,
With brave, red lips that smiled so steadily,
I saw in her deep eyes only the brilliant flash,
And to my ignorance, she seemed most fair.....
I used to envy her,—
Though God knows why!

The Prodigal

Now I am older.....
And when I pass her on the city street,
The Woman,—
I seem to see beneath that painted smile
Stark hopelessness. I hear the futile sobbing
Of her driven soul, knowing that it has lost
Life's holiest treasures sacred to her womanhood.....
I thank God hurriedly,—
That 'tis not I!

The Prodigal

THE LAND OF MIGHT HAVE BEEN

There's a beautiful land of Might Have Been,
Which lies by the river of Past,
Where dwell the shadows of Other Days
And the Dreams that cannot last.

The violets grow beneath the grass
And the heather over the fen,
But the violets wither, the heath grows brown,
In the land of Might Have Been.

We all have sailed to this distant land
Down the long, swift river of Past,
And we've taken our dreams and our longings there
And built us a stronghold vast,
Wherein we treasure each smile,—each sigh,—
Each hope,—each kiss,—and then—
We silently bar the heavy gates
To the land of Might Have Been.

And silently still, though our eyes are wet
And our hearts are numb with pain,
We turn our steps in the paths of Fate
Back to our lives again.
Back to the land of That Which Is,
Forgetting,—if we can.
Oh, God,—could we only keep our thoughts
From that land of Might Have Been!

The Prodigal

CHARITY.

A beggar lay on the city street,
With a crippled back, and a cup at his feet.
“God’s pity!”—he cries to the passerby,
But he sees Life better than you or I!

A woman, robed in furs of brown,
From her limousine was stepping down,
Her fair face hardened, her eyes dismayed,
As she passed the beggar who needed aid.
“ ’Tis a careless city; an ill-kept street,
That allows such vermin under my feet.
Encouraging loafers; fostering crime;
I’ll speak to the mayor when I have time!”

But another woman beside her stood,
Who had tasted evil and knew not good,
From her draggled hat to her shabby feet
She was label’d a woman from off the street.
She gazed at the beggar with knowing look,
Then out of her purse some pennies took.
“My money is earned from the gutter too,
But that doesn’t matter to me—or you!”

A beggar lay on the city street,
With a crippled back, and a cup at his feet.
“God’s pity!”—he cries to the passerby,
But he knows Life better than you or I!

The Prodigal

LITTLE ONE.

Sitting smiling in the sun,
Little one.
All your playtime just begun,
Little one.
Bees and birds and butterflies
Dance before your baby eyes;
What know you of tears or sighs,—
Little one?

Clouds may veil that happy light,
Little one.
Day will deepen into night,
Little one.
Life won't be all play and fun,
Soon your lessons will be done
And your work in life begun,—
Little one!

Oh, if I could lead you there,
Little one!
Guide your feet and point each snare,
Little one.
But alone you tread the road,
Face the storm and lift the load,
Gather what your hands have sowed,—
Little one!

The Prodigal

Keep your journey bright each mile,
Little one.

Meet your trials with a smile,
Little one.

So, when life is nearly done,
Problems met and battles won,
You'll be sitting in the sun,—
Little one!

The Prodigal

THE LAND OF LOVERS.

There's a mystical land over yonder,
Beyond the grey of the mist,
Where dreams come true in their splendor,
And lips of the lonely are kissed.
There are shimmering, gossamer fancies
Like meadows of asphodels,
And the stars are the fair, white blossoms
In that land where romance dwells.

There's a crescent moon over yonder,
That we'll use as a wee, white boat,
And I'll gather a cloud dipped in silver
To cover your slim, young throat.
The storms and the rains will not touch us,
We will sail so far and so high,
And the stars will bend o'er us gently
To kiss us,—as we pass by!

Oh, a feast is spread over yonder,
On a cloth that is woven of dew,
And the chalice that holds the nectar
Is the warm, red mouth of you!
Your sigh is the attar of blossoms
Distilled from the gardens of May;
Your tears but the rain on their petals
That the sun of my love dries away!

The Prodigal

'Tis a wonderful land over yonder,
That is hung twix the night and the dawn,
And only true lovers may sail there
In the bark by a moon-beam drawn.
No world-weary eyes shall behold it,—
As age sweeps us on down its stream,
But Youth welcomes Youth at the harbor
Of that land where Dream meets Dream!

The Prodigal

THIS TIME O'YEAR.

There's a rush of waters alive with glee,
 This time o'year,
And a strong, swift wind sweeping over the lea,
 This time o'year,
There are new, wee birds in the sparrow's nest,
And a deeper red to the robin's breast,
And a finer spume to the sea-wave's crest,

 This time o'year.
There's a different lilt to the lark's sweet song,
 This time o'year,
There's a clearer edge to the shadows long,
 This time o'year,
A vague, sweet murmur and stir is abroad,
'Tis the hour of creation in tree and sod,
Some call it nature,—and some call it God,
 This time o'year!

There are eyes that melt in a softened glow,
 This time o'year,
From hearts that awake after winter's snow,
 This time o'year,
The air is warm and the sun is higher,
The right to love is the world's desire,
And lover's lips are like velvet and fire,
 This time o'year!

The Prodigal

There's a sense of awe in the human breast,
 This time o'year,
A kinship with nature, half-expressed,
 This time o'year,
Winter is gone with it's bitter sting;
Faith expands like a living thing,
And Death's but a step to another Spring,—
 This time o'year!

THE PATCH-WORK QUILT.

Bits of velvet and scraps of silk
Grooped in Arabic style,
Patiently cut and pieced and stitched,
Through many a weary while.
Some are as blue as the turquoise sky
Or a placid, sapphire sea;
Green as young leaves that trembling hang
From gently swaying tree;
Gold as ripe grain; brown as sear leaf
In Autumn's splendor dressed;
Red as the letter, branding shame,
That blazed on Hester's breast.
Violet, saffron, grey and mauve,
Black as a raven's wing;
Broidered in intricate handiwork,—
A dazzlingly lovely thing!

The Prodigal

Bits of adventure and scraps of joy,
Pieced through the long, long years.
Scraps of duty, of work, of play,
Stitched with our smiles,—our tears.
Green of envy—purple of pride—
Monotonous brown and grey,
Gold of our love—black of our sins—
Red with brief passion's sway:
Broidered with patience to hide each flaw,
Each struggle, pain or defeat,—
For we must have grey to balance the gold,
As the bitter enhances the sweet.
Bits of beauty,—or scraps of sin,
Pieced on the human soul!
God! Forget Thou the black—the red—
And only adjudge the whole!

The Prodigal

I PLANTED ME A GARDEN.

I planted me a garden—
 In the Spring,
And in the warm, sweet earth
Seeds sprang in flower-birth.
Ah, Life was mirth, all mirth—
 In the Spring!

I gathered from my garden
 In my Youth.
First early lilies white,
Pure dreams of love and light.
Ah, Life was bright, so bright—
 In my Youth!

I cut me crimson roses
 Later on,—
Each one a heart-throb mad,
Knowledge of all earth had.
Ah, Life was glad, all glad—
 Later on!

I pulled the quiet myrtle
 After that,
For sorrow came with years,
Dead hopes dim faith and fears.
Ah, Life was tears, all tears—
 After that!

The Prodigal

Dismantled lay my garden
 In the fall,
But when the tumults cease,
I'll plant the brave heartsease,—
For Life is peace, all peace—
 In the fall!

The Prodigal

TOGETHER.

We climbed the hill together,
You and I.
Love's roses were so fragrant in the dew,
The sky above was too ablaze for blue,
The nests of mating birds hung strong and new.
You bravely gave your hand,
Too young to understand
Why others feared the climbing—
T'ward the sky!

We climbed the hill together,
You and I.
The waving grain made music in the wind,
And drowsy calves and awkward lambkins lay
In sheltering shade aside their mother-kind.
You gently touched my hand,
And bade me understand
What life perhaps would whisper—
By and by!

We reached the top together,
You and I,
And oh, the view that stretched on every side!
The sky above was fired with sunset glow,
While shadows veiled the dangers passed below.
We knew each path,—each scar,—
We'd come so far—so far,
Through morns and noons and evenings,—
You and I!

The Prodigal

We're going down the hill now,
You and I,
But oh, the soft'ning after-glow beyond!
The road beneath our step is safe and sure
To those whose love could serve and pain endure.
Still on the path our feet,
We'll reach the "Valley"—Sweet,
Together—as we started—
You and I!

The Prodigal

MY SHIP.

My life is like a ship: the wide, blue sea
Is but the world,—so measureless and vast.
The waves sometimes are high—they cover me,
And oft I think my hope and peace are past.

I see the other boats astride the waves,
Their sails are white, their cargo fresh and fair.
Again I see the wrecks of sinful lives
Adrift—against the black rocks of despair!

Sometimes the sea is blue and calm with peace,
No storm-ways beat against my firm boat's side,
And straight before me lies the Harbor safe,
Toward which, all the many vessels ride.

But though our lives are happier in the calm,
And sweet the day; and deep with peace the night,—
We make but little headway t'ward the Port,
From which streams forth the welcome, morning light.

For 'tis not calm and balmy seas of blue,
That make our wilful ship of life sail fast
And ride triumphant into sheltering Port,—
'Tis God's own storms that drive us Home at last!

LOVE IS NOT BUILT OF GOSSAMER.

Love is not built of gossamer,
Nor touched with rainbow dye.
The "castles in the air" are myths,—
We cannot build so high.
No, love is built of brick on brick,
So it may stand the test,
The bricks are small and dull and plain,
Unnoticed at their best.

There is a brick called courtesy,
And one of patience too,
And one of daily trivial tasks
That each of us must do.
There is the brick of sacrifice,
Of service,—tried and long,
Forbearance, pity, comfort, trust,
When everything seems wrong.

The bricks of love are mortared down
With smiles and pain and tears,
Until they're strong and firm and straight,—
A buttress 'gainst the years.
Love is not built of gossamer,
Nor in a summer's day,
But by long years that dry our tears
And chase the clouds away.

The Prodigal

Ah, could I lay the bricks aright
 In true and earnest life,
That the fair walls might ride the clouds
 Defying storm and strife,
So when I finish earth's great task
 And other work begin,
I'll find I've raised a tower of love—
 And built my soul within!

THE FICKLE LIGHT.

Low marsh, with a wild wind sweep
And a moonless night above;
A moonless night like a velvet robe
On the shoulders of my love.
But a fluttering light
Through the fog-mists grey,
Flickers ahead—afar—
It may be only a Will-o-the-wisp,—
Or it may be a shining Star!

Brave dreams of strong, sweet youth,
Mid the sordid swamps of fear;
Swamps that cling to each vision fair
As vapors across the meer.
But a ray of hope
Through the mists of doubt,
Flickers ahead—afar—
It may be only a Will-o-the-wisp,—
Or it may be a beck'ning Star!

A longing heart, through mute, sad hours,
And a waiting into the years;
A vigil that weights the wings of faith
And dims the eyes with tears.
But the wavering hope
Of a deathless joy,
Flickers ahead—afar—
It may be only a Will-o-the-wisp,—
Or it may be Love's radiant Star!

The Prodigal

SHIPS THAT NEVER COME.

If all my ships came sailing home,
Came sailing home to me,
I would not have one ship afloat
Across the azure sea.
The boundless sea,
The open sea,
No ships to come to me!

If all my dreams came surely true,
Came surely true for me,
I would not have one vision left
For eager eyes to see.
For eager eyes
To idealize,
No dreams remaining me!

If all my joys came crowding in,
Came crowding in to me,
I would not have one glad hour left,
No place for smiles to be.
No place in me
For ecstasy.
No room where joys might be!

If all the wealth and all the power
Came showering down on me,
I would not have one aim to press
To prove ability.
No foes to meet,
No striving sweet
To test the worth of me!

The Prodigal

If all my ships came sailing in,
Came sailing in to me,
'Twould stifle effort, cool desire,
And crush the faith in me.
'Twould lull the gale
That sets the sail
Of ships across the sea!

No, let me rather longing be
For ships that never come!
For dreams that linger, hopes that wait,
And work that's never done.
Then shall it be,—
The Soul of me
Will press steadfastly on!

The Prodigal

SONGS AT EVENING.

There's a pine log red and glowing,
And a rag-rug on the floor,
With a host of shadows dancing
On the panels of the door.
There's an old harp in the corner
With the fire-light on each string,
And the melodies I love best, are
The evening songs you sing.

Yes, the songs you sing at evening
To the mellow chords you play,
Fill the room with benediction
At the closing of the day.
There's a wistfulness and yearning
That reveals the hidden tear,
And I see in every melody
My bride of yester-year!

Oh, the songs that throb so softly
From your dear, familiar throat,
Bring the mem'ries crowding round me
At each quiver of a note.
I can hear old-fashioned garments
Rustle down the winding stair;
See the light of candles sifting
Crystal star-light on your hair.

The Prodigal

When you sing of Annie Laurie
It recalls a purpled moor,
And the lilt of Southern folk-songs
Takes me back to Swanee's shore,
But your lullabies so tender
Bring the quick tears to my eyes,
For I see our children's faces
Ere the crooning whisper dies.

Oh, the years have brought their smiling,
And the years have sent their pain,—
But your voice was ever with me
Through the sunshine and the rain.
Ever with me,—till that evening
When the last grey shadows creep,
May you still be singing—singing—
When I close my eyes in sleep!

The Prodigal

THE LONG ROAD.

It leads through banks of clover,
It winds past fields of grain,
Tis smiling in the sunshine
And muddy in the rain,
Tis weary to the foot-sore
At the twilight of the day,—
For the dawning of the morning
Is just one night away!

The long road; the gay road,—
Each joyous lover trips,
When hand is fast in hand-clasp
And lips are close to lips!
They lightly laugh at parting,
Each passing, sunlit day,—
For the dawning of the morning
Is just one night away!

But the long road; the hard road,—
Winds up and down the hill,
And the air that blows at evening,
Can leave a sudden chill.
Our Youth lies far behind us
And we droop beside the way,—
Forgetting that the morning
Is just one night away!

The Prodigal

The long road; the strange road,—
Ahead of aging years.
We tread the narrow valley
Through the vale of weary tears.
But beyond the road of shadows,
Will come the waking day,—
For the dawning of the morning
Is just one night away!

The Prodigal

GOODBYE.

Every country has its own
Farewell cry.
You and I—
Simply say a-down the years
Words that tremble through the tears,—
“Dearest Heart
Goodbye!”

Where the sun-kissed fields of France
Lie in dew,
Sky of blue;
Dusky hair and witching way;
Shrug of shoulder; parting gay,—
“Au revoir—
Adieu!”

In the hills of sunny Spain
Ever thus,
Dear to us.
Castañet and tambourine;
Lacy veils or satin sheen,—
Cry to us—
“Adios!”

On Italia's vine-clad shores
Flowers blow;
Rivers flow.
Neath the olive branches' shade,
Lover's parting serenade,—
“A rivederci—
Addio!”

The Prodigal

In the northern German land
Homefolks reign,
Noble strain.
Quiet, they—of sober mind,
Speak their parting gracious, kind.
So—“Auf—
Wiedersehen!”

Every country has its own
Farewell cry;
Its “Goodbye”
But our own more precious seems,—
“God be with you” dear, it means.
With a sigh—
And—“Goodbye!”

The Prodigal

LACE.

The edge of fleecy clouds adrift in space.
White foam from beating surf in storm's embrace.
Patterns of dew, that dawn's fair fingers trace.
A gossamer spider-web in some dim place.
A baby's frock, where ribbons interlace.
A bridal-veil, hanging with vestal grace.
Fine wrinkles on some aging, kindly face.

THE DREAM BARGE.

Dark is the deck of the Dream Barge
For it only sails with the night,
And along the shores and the shallows
Each star is a harbor light.
No voices sound from the pilot
To guide the barque on its way,
And the mem'ries circling the Dream Boat
Will vanish like mist with the day.

Swift is the flight of the Dream Barge
For her sails are spread to the skies,
And we're borne through portals of slumber
To the country where love never dies.
Dim faces peer from the shadows
And voices we've loved down the years,
Till the river of Soul's Returning
Has become a river of tears.

Brief is the stay of the Dream Barge;
Fleeter than echoes could tell,
And the pale hands that meet us in welcome
Soon wave back a parting farewell.
But the dreams from that voyage we've gathered
Have driven our tears all away,
And the tender caresses of Lost Ones
Have strengthened our hearts for the day!

The Prodigal

ON "MOTHER'S DAY".

She walks alone—
On Mother's Day.
No gifts past years of sacrifice repay:
No words—no smiles—no childish kisses,—save
The silent memories held within a grave!

She walks alone
With head held high.
She does not show her tears in passing by.
Women endure,—no matter what their loss,—
One Mother saw her Son upon a cross!

Is she alone
In ways apart?
Or do small voices speak unto her heart,
While unseen hands upon her brow are laid
To crown with blossoms that shall never fade?

Oh, you who pause
On Mother's Day,
To send your fragrant gifts to one away,
Speak to this mother—to whom no one gives,
Tell her,—there is no death! Her child still lives!

GRANDFATHER'S CLOCK.

Grandfather's clock stands in the hall
With a pendulum long and slim.
Grandfather's hair was thin and white,—
I can just remember him.
But Grandfather's gone and the clock is here,
And the pendulum swings through many a year—
A day—a night!
A night—a day!
Ticking, ticking away!

My lover waits in the sunlit hall
With the fire of love on his brow.
My lover's hair is mahogany brown
As the mellow old clock is now.
But the years will pass and my lover will go,
While the clock will be swinging its pendulum slow—
A day—a night!
A night—a day!
Ever, ever away!

So I'll pledge him my troth in the same, old hall
While the clock smiles down from above,
For though it is old in the counts of time
It is wise in the ways of love.
This life is so brief for the love we bear,
And the fleeter it is—the sweeter to share!
A day—a night!
A night—a day!
Loving, loving away!

The Prodigal

ON THE TRAIL OF THE GYPSY MOON.

Oh, a Gypsy moon is rising,
One by one the stars surprising
As she rides along the highway of the skies,
 And she calls the timid lovers
 Down the road her silver covers;
 Down the open road where romance never dies.

Hark, the eerie night-birds calling,
And the velvet shadows falling
O'er the quiet of the garden's dim retreat,
 And I listen for your singing
 That has set my heart a-ringing,
 And the patter of your slim and dancing feet.

There are roses in my bower,
But there's not a single flower
That can rival quite the fragrance of your hair,
 For with long and clinging tresses
 That my trembling hand caresses,
 It has found and bound my heart within its snare.

Oh, the road of night and gladness
Is a trail of silver madness
With the Gypsy moon a-smiling on our bliss.
 Let us follow it with rapture,
 Every happiness to capture
 That is found within the promise of a kiss!

Love's Epitome

A Cycle

The Prodigal

IN BLOSSOM TIME.

I saw her first among the pink and white
Of apple-blossoms,—falling at her feet
From ghostly branches; and in that Spring light,
She looked herself a blossom, young and sweet!

And then from out the rosy, scented air,
I heard the silvery music of her voice—
Laughing as petals fell upon her hair.....
And knew my heart at last had made its choice!

The Prodigal

REST.

(“Deus haec otia fecit”—God hath made this a rest.)

Since first I met thee, life has been
A melody with one refrain.
Contentment, with thine arms about;
Peace, that I could not live without;
Dear one, 'tis only thus expressed—
“God hath made this a rest”.

To find, to love, to have, to hold,
Life could not pay me brighter gold.
This tenderness and truth which lies
Within the love-light of thine eyes!
I bow my head upon thy breast—
“God hath made this a rest”.

REQUIEM.

My love lies dead. The withered leaves
Fall silently from dying trees
Upon her grave; her new-made bed.
Yet not alone she sleepeth there,
For hushed upon her breast so fair,
My heart lies dead!

Nine "Pen Points"

DECORATION DAY.

They sleep.....

If, in their quiet graves beneath our flowers,
They slumber deeply on, and count no weary hours,
And rest—eternally secure—in love like ours,—

Then sleep!

You weep.....

But if tears flow from resignation,—not regret;
If all war's bitterness and hate you can forget,
And in the joy of love—still theirs—your eyes are wet,

Then weep!

The Prodigal

MY BABY.

Little specks of blue,—
Some folks call 'em eyes,—
Mother knows they're simply
Pieces from the skies.

Little streaks of red,—
Some folks call 'em lips,—
Mother knows the scraps fell off
Where the sunset dips.

Little wisps of gold,—
Some folks call it hair,—
Mother knows a sunbeam
Caught and melted there.

A FANCY.

Pale moonlight glistening on the snow,
Or shady banks where rivers flow;
The early violet, dew-pearled;
 The hum of bee;
 The summer sea;—
How God must love the world!

The clasp of hand in trouble's hour;
The open petals of a flower;
A baby's hair,—soft, downy, curled;
 The shadows long;
 A robin's song,—
How God must love the world!

The Prodigal

SUFFICIENCY

My lips met yours,
That day in June;
And all the flowers in garden, field and vale
Hung motionless and pale!
For what exotic fragrance
Could they offer at our feet—
One half so sweet?

My lips met yours,
That night in June;
And all the stars—wee lanterns of the night—
Hung cold and white!
For what illuminated radiance
Could they offer, far above,
Like to our love?

The Prodigal

GREATNESS

They say to suffer, brings greatest gain.
They say the Great became thus great through pain.
'Tis truth! A wondrous doctrine! But yet—wait—
Remember ALL who suffer are not Great!

The Prodigal

THE POET'S WIFE

I loved him so—I let him go!
He did not know my sacrifice,
And did not need the love I prize—
The wealth of heart I could bestow!

He smiled—and pitied e'en my woe,
Then tried to comfort me the more,
But chafed beneath the yoke he wore—
And so—and so—I let him go!

The Prodigal

INFINITUM

A glaring sun; a blinding rain;
The reek of sin; the grip of pain;
Regret, endurance, struggle, strife—
And is this Life?

A purple sky; a silence deep;
A last, long, restful, dreamless sleep;
A smile of peace; one soft, tired breath—
And is this Death?

If smiling peace is sorrow's end,
And Life leads but to Death, my friend,
Then Death—in conquering pain and strife—
Must lead to Life!

The Prodigal

ENDURANCE

To suffer is the test of Birth,
 Of rank, of quality,
Who bears in silence and alone,
 A "thoroughbred" is he!
Endurance is the mark of kings,
 To silence they revert.
He only is low-born indeed,
 Who needs cry out when hurt!

ONE NIGHT

A moonbeam stooped and kissed me,
As I stood 'neath her silver rays,
 But my heart was chill
 And my soul was still
In the flood-light of her gaze.

My lover stooped and kissed me,
As I stood 'neath the April skies,
 And my heart throbs spoke
 For my soul awoke
In the love-light of his eyes!

Two Sonnets

TO MY FRIEND

I see you in the grasses on the lea,
And hear you in the pulsing joyous note
Of songbirds, in theplash of lilting boat
Upon the bosom of some sapphire sea.
I know your thoughts are often here with me
In solitude; in those dim, quiet hours remote,
When twilight wraps her shadows 'round my throat
Like widow's veils—after the sunbeams flee!
Ah, let me send my love to you this night,
Breathing one note into the distant song,
So it may comfort you when hours are long,
Like softly whispered prayer upon your lip.
And in your waking, find with morning light,
The music of harmonious fellowship!

A WATER LILY

Your love is like a lily—cool and pale,
That wraps around its perfumed heart of gold
Long, slender petals, each a velvet fold
Of chill, celestial white; a modest veil.
You drift beneath an over-hanging shale
Where tangled brake and spongy mosses old
Shield well your frailty from sudden cold.
Are you—like chalice of the Holy Grail—
Too pure to open heart to golden beam
Of robber Sun, that shines above your pool?
Can you not feel his warmth in waters cool
As he rides by—your ardent devotee?
Then, Love, be not a placid flower upon the stream,
But lift your fragrant face and welcome me!

A Dozen Little Poems

LITTLE GHOSTS

Petals.....

Lying carelessly strewn
From amorous roses long since set aside
By indifferent hands.

Letters.....

Torn into bits,
Resembling fluttering snow before the wind,
Dead scraps of paper.

Crumbs from the banquet table;
Dregs of wine in the cup;
Faint echoes of distant harmonies
Like the rapidly fading colors of sunset;
The memory of your kisses.....
Ah, little ghosts, little ghosts—
Returning to haunt me!

DEAD HANDS

Folded.....

Like slender lily leaves
Upon a breast now hushed, as the calm
Of midnight world asleep.

Folded.....

Like old, worn envelopes
About the pages of oft-read letters
Still held to a faithful heart.

Folded.....

Away from us!

We, who loved to kiss their perfumed softness;
We, who may only dare hope, that—
Somewhere, somehow, sometime,
They will thrill with Life again,
And in Eternity.....

Stretch out to welcome us!

The Prodigal

MY LOVER AND MY FRIEND.

My Lover reveled in my smile—
As roses in the sun,
And stayed contented at my side
While life was sweet and young.
But when a shadow crossed my face,
And pain and sorrow met,
My lover turned and left me then—
For lovers soon forget!

My Friend, whom I ne'er smiled upon,
Nor welcomed in my heart,
Had never left me, but kept watch—
A little way apart.
And when he saw my loneliness,
He came and shared my pain,
For lovers run at fleeting smiles—
But friends, true friends, remain!

The Prodigal

MUSIC

Speech is for man alone. No other sphere
Claims our own sounds—'tis earthly born.
But music—language of the gods—
Existed long before this young earth's morn!
We know by our own souls that thrill and move
With memory, at a single strain sublime
That still goes forth—perchance to reach the
hearts
Of others, living at some future time.

Art's triumphs are destroyed by age and war.
A sculptured figure crumbles into clay,
The literature of every nation's pride
May fall in silence of unread decay.
But music—highest of all noble arts—
Will never die nor even cease to be.
We know not whence it came, nor how,
Nor where it ends in the eternity.

ATTAR OF LOVE

'Tis not the perfume of the rose,
'Tis not the jewel's gleam,
Nor ripples on the summer sea
Where lovers sit and dream,
'Tis not the springtime's bud and breeze,
Nor autumn's flaming glow,
'Tis not the chime of winter bells
Across the glistening snow.

No, 'tis the silver of your voice,
The sunlight on your hair,
The ready smile, the happiness
In little things we share,
The still communion of our hearts,
The rest long hours bestow,
'Tis just the "peace of God on earth"—
Dear heart, because I know!

THE POET'S REQUIEM

To Deirdre

We miss thy song!.....
Yet, in a little while,
(Life is so brief)
We, too, shall journey on,
And, reaching thee in spaces far,
Shall read again
The golden, limpid words
From off thy pen.
God could not let those hands
Lie folded—stilled!
So, we shall see the visions fair
That thou hast always seen,
The deeper knowledge,
Beauty, rhythm, grace—
The very soul of thee—
Written indelibly with flaming pen,
Across the parchments of eternity!

The Prodigal

I THANK THEE, LORD!

I thank Thee, Lord, for every pain
I suffer here;
I thank Thee that a smile may show
Beneath the tear.
From every fall—there's need to rise!
In every grief—a lesson lies!

I thank Thee, Lord for every sin
Half-overcome;
I thank Thee, Lord, for every race
But partly won.
For every loss—shows me the Prize!
And every Hell—PROVES Paradise!

The Prodigal

AND LET THE WORLD GO BY

They gave you to me—and the sun arose
 On the gleam of the morning dew.
I kissed the bloom of your fair, soft cheek.
 And the lids of your eyes so blue.
I asked no boon but a simple home;
 No joy save your smile or your sigh;
Willing to dwell by your side, alone,
 And let the world go by!

They took you from me—and the sun went
 down
 And the skies were drear and bleak.
I closed your eyes with a sobbing kiss,
 And left a tear on your cheek!
But memory comes in the firelight glow,
 As I watch the embers die,
And I'm willing to dwell in the past,
 with you—
 And let the world go by!

The Prodigal

INVOCATION

Help me to make this working day
A little brighter, if I may,
To lighten weary, irksome grind
By trying to be kind.

By giving credit where it's due;
Hushing reports that are not true,
And leaving pettiness behind,
That hinders being kind.

Let me not shrink from duties grim,
Allowing interests to grow dim,
Nor let me chafe at ties that bind,
But oh,—let me be kind!

Let me not look for praise nor fame
To advertise my humble name,
But to all selfish aims be blind
By just remaining kind.

Help me to meet life face to face;
Each opportunity embrace,
Enlarge my soul; expand my mind,
And, oh!—Let me be kind!

The Prodigal

DINNA YE KEN?

'Tis time I gang to work, lass,
 I canna dream a'day.
There's cuttin' down o'grain, lass,
 There's reapin' o'the hay.
But through the live-lang hours, lass,
 Ye might think oft' of Ben,
Who loves ye bonny well, lass,
 Darling—dinna ye ken?

'Tis time I gang to sleep, lass,
 I canna think a'night.
The whippoorwill is callin' me
 To snuff my candle light.
But soon will come the dawn, lass,
 I'll dream o' ye till then
For I love ye bonny well, lass,
 Darling—dinna ye ken?

DEAD LEAVES.

They fall—so silently, so soft,
It makes me think
Of tender little ghosts who loth
To cross the brink,
Have sent their tiny messengers ahead,
From out the vale of living to the dead.

They fall—so gracefully, so slow,
I'm very sure
That when my time has come to go,
And change endure,
I'll think of how the leaves, without a sound,
Sank trustingly and gently to the ground.

They fall—so tenderly, so light,
It makes me feel
That all this fear of winter and of night
Was never real,
And though the leaves may die, the tree-still king
Will, soul-like, live to see another spring.

The Prodigal

TRAGEDY.

To end the day,
To go back home and never see
You stand beside the open door
Awaiting me.
To find no loving hands that ministered
In other days,
To miss your gentle voice,
Your tender ways.
To go without
That little, evening talk
That quiet settlement of worries met
And then—our star-lit walk.
To never feel again
That peace of heart and home,
The proof of love, the rest
I find upon your loving breast.
To lose you!
Miss you!
Want you!
This would be—
Tragedy
To me!



Renunciation

A Cycle

(Dedicated to Lucile)

- 1. The Meeting.**
- 2. Forbidden Me!**
- 3. At Parting.**
- 4. The Journey.**
- 5. Envoy.**

THE MEETING.

Grey skies; grey sea;
A waste of surf and sand.
A few low branches, like ghostly arms,
Reach down and touch my hand.
Empty and bleak
As a wan, pale cheek,
The marsh lies before my eyes;
And over-head,
Like a soul terror-sped,
One great-winged sea-gull flies.

Blue skies; blue sea;
A stretch of shining sand.
The soft green branches, like loving arms,
Reach down and kiss my hand.
Rosy with haze
In the sunsets rays,
The marsh lies before my eyes;
And over-head,
Like a soul love-sped,
A gull to its mate swift' flies.

Is it the self-same scene I face?
What miracle has taken place?
Ah, Love, I thought you knew!
I have met you!

FORBIDDEN ME!

Then from the sky
As thunderbolt of storm
Strikes the green tree
All budding in the morn,
And fells it with an unexpected blow,—
The knowledge came—that I must turn and go
Out of your life,
From things that are, I see,
 Forbidden me!

No dreams that I
Have visioned in the night,
Nor hours of day—
When with mine eyes alight
I faced the world with triumph in my pride—
Can e'er bring back the glory that has died!
Ah, love, to find
The joys that were to be,—
 Forbidden me!

Long, long the years
That I must brave and meet,
Only a memory
To ease the bittersweet,
And see each year the loneliness and age—
Creep,—on adown my own life's empty page
Away from you!
Our love that was to be,
 Forbidden me!

AT PARTING.

I love you more, because
We parted as we did!
Because, while looking in your eyes,
I saw I had not left one cause for deep regret.
Those eyes that I had learned
To love—(ah, God, how much!)—
Would still be able, with a pride and force,
To meet the whole wide world as honestly and true
As if we had not glanced
Adown that path where roses bloom—
But where one plucks—the rue!
No path, my love, has room for more than two!
So, though I kissed your lips,
I understood I could not journey
Down that road—with you!

I love you more, because
We left no touch of sordidness
To mar our souls:
No words nor deeds that were not savored
With respect and trust.
The passion of our hearts
Remained a flame, and did not burn
Itself to ashes and to dust!
I left that manhood I admire,
A thing to keep forever in my mind
As something fine and strong,
And left with you the mem'ry of my love
Unmarred,—a clear white fire!
Renunciation is a finer thing
Than satisfied desire!

The Prodigal

And so, I love you more
Because we parted as we did. And though
My heart cries out for you,
And eyes are wet with weary, futile tears
That cannot ease the pain—nor will not ease,
Until I look upon your face again—
I still am proud, that I have clearly seen
The strong, fine honor of your soul and mind!
My lips have met on yours—
That last brave time—
They blessed me with their touch.
The Flame is bright—serene—controlled—
It lights me as I go,
I take its memory to the end!—
Is it not better so?

THE JOURNEY.

The narrow track winds on and on
And the wheels turn round and round;
The trees fly by, the smoke drifts high,
And the dust swirls over the ground.

My heart lies back
On that narrow track,
But the train still carries me on!

Life's journey runs down a narrow track
And the wheels go round and round.
Events fly past, each follows the last,
Lost treasures lie thick o'er the ground.

My youth lies back
Down that narrow track,
And the train still carries me on!

I'll reach the end of this narrow track
And I'll think my journey is done,
But it's only a turn.....a bend of the road,
And the train will go steadily on.

My life will lie back
On that finished track,
But my soul will go on and on!

The Prodigal

ENVOY.

So life must pass into the Great Beyond,
Leaving the years a silent page.
And I, too, must adventure forth
Where spring and youth will never age.

Then, if I wake and find in that Dim Land
No knowledge of this earthly plane,
Oh, let me start anew—
And meet you, love, unfettered; mine again!

But if I wake and in that Newer Life
Remember what has gone before,
(How love had passed me by)
Oh, let me not awake—but sleep forevermore!



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